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THE BIRTH OF THE FLAG

THE BIRTH OF THE FLAG

A Novelty in Three Acts

BY

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SYNOPSIS

ACT I-----Home of Betsy Ross
ACT II-----Home of Rachel Sympson
ACT III-----Receiving the Flag at the Home of Betsy Ross

CHARACTERS

Betsy Ross, the widow of John Ross-----
Phoebe Allen, a quaker maid-----
Manda Spooner, a gossip-----
Rachel Sympson, a plain woman-----
Abigail Hunter, a deaf woman-----
Patience Loveall, an old maid-----
George Washington -----
Robert Morris -----
George Ross -----
A Young quaker, Phoebe's lover-----
A Fifer and Drummer, minor characters-----

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Costumes and General Characteristics of Characters

Ladies

Betsy Ross wears a short full dress, a white apron, and a cap, well trimmed with bright ribbons. She must understand the art of dramatic reading.

Phoebe Allen wears a plain full dress, a cap, and apron. She should be able to sing well.

Amanda Spooner wears dress, apron, bonnet, suitable to the time.

Rachel Sympson, dressed in fashion of the day. She should be able to sing well.

Abigail Hunter, plain and old-fashioned woman.

Patience Loveall, much over dressed.

Gentlemen

George Washington_____	{	Attired as soldiers of the period.
Robert Morris_____		
George Ross_____		

Washington is more artistically attired.

Young quaker wears a light colored suit much too small and adorned by patches. He wears a shoe and a boot, a broad rimmed hat and a taffy colored wig.

The drummer and fifer are minor characters and remain back of screen.

NOTE

(1) The sound of fife and drum should be heard before the curtain rolls up for first act, and now and then during play.

(2) The star with five points which Betsy uses as pattern may be already cut out or marked in such a way there will be no trouble in having a perfect star for exhibition.

A large flag may be used by placing a field of blue with the Thirteen stars arranged in circle over one on flag.

ACT I

Home of Betsy Ross, Arch Street, Philadelphia, (old-fashioned furnishing. A number of chairs, a lounge, a clock, one or two home-made rugs on floor, a small table at one side of room with a family Bible upon it; a large table with bright-colored material scattered over it where Betsy is at work; a spinning wheel on the opposite side of room where Phoebe is engaged. The sound of the fife and drum and the tramp of feet on the street interest Phoebe and now and then call her from her work to the window.)

Betsy

(Turns from table with the scissors in one hand and some bright material in the other.)

"I would like to know, Phoebe Allen, what you are about. You have spent a good part of the afternoon going to the window and not one hank of yarn spun yet. The first thing you know the spring and summer will be gone and fall here, and the spinning not done."

Phoebe

(Resumes work) "I 'spose I'm a little excited over all that's goin' on in the street; it's pretty hard to work when there is so much to see and hear."

Betsy

"I am about out of patience with you, for I just can't endure shiftlessness.

"The real truth of the matter, you are watching some likely young man as he gets ready for war. The first thing you know you will try to join the army and go to the war too."

Phoebe

"Thee does not know what thee is a talkin' about: Madam Betsy, a Quaker maid knows that war is a wicked thing. Thee must not kill." (The noise on the street again calls Phoebe to the window. She turns to Betsy much excited.)

Phoebe

"There are three of the Continental soldiers a comin' to this

house this very minute. Sure as thee lives they are comin' here. What if they think thee is a Tory? I'd just like to know what thee would do then, Madam Betsy."

Betsy

"Why, I would do just what I am doing now, work of course for a living. Let them come; it will not take long for them to learn that Betsy Ross is not a Tory nor a friend to King George either. You don't need to feel afraid, Phoebe, for they are not the first soldiers to come to my place of business and they are not likely to be the last: (knock at door). Go, Phoebe, and see what they want." (Phoebe goes to the door and presently returns followed by George Ross, George Washington and Robert Morris. Each man carries his hat in hand; Washington also carries a large scroll. Betsy arises as the men enter.)

George Ross

"Why, sister Betsy, how-do-you-do! (shakes hands) Madam Ross this is General George Washington, Commander-in-Chief of the army. (Betsy courtesies and shakes hands.) This other gentleman (turning to Morris) is Robert Morris, the man who has charge of our war-pocket-book." (Betsy again courtesies and shake shands.)

Washington

"So this is Madam Petsy Ross we have heard so much about of late?"

Betsy

"Yes, I am Betsy Ross of Arch Street; just plain Betsy Ross, the widow of John Ross. (Turns to Phoebe) Set up some chairs, Phoebe, for these men." (The chairs are brought and the men are seated).

George Ross

"Betsy, these men have called to see you this afternoon upon a little matter of business pertaining to the army, and to the Congress."

Betsy

(Turns to Washington.) "I do hope, General, you have not

decided to call the wives and mothers into the army and have come to tell me about it."

Washington

"The wives and mothers are already in the war, whether they ever go into open battle or not. War is a horrible thing, a queer way for sane people to settle their difficulties. I am sick and tired of it all. Women and children are supposed to be exempt from it at least; we do not aim to make war upon them, but in the end they are the ones who suffer most from it. We are already greatly indebted to the women of the Colonies for their heroic service. They have been equal to every emergency. If this thing keeps up, we are going to be forced to make greater calls upon their time and strength."

Betsy

"I want you to know, General, right now that I am with you to do my part. For our brothers across the sea must realize that while we are few in number, we cannot and must not submit to tyranny."

Washington

"We are all going to do our best. I don't see how we can fail to prove to the world that we have the right to be free with so many of our loyal hearted women working and praying for us as they are.

For in the name of our God to the battle we will go.
In the name of our God we will conquer every foe
For the God of heaven our King will be
And will give us victory, Yes a glorious victory!"

Betsy

"I sincerely hope and pray it may be so."

Washington

(Looks at clock) "I see the time is going so I must hasten to tell you, Madam Ross, why we have called upon you this afternoon. Congress has decided we need but one flag which should be made suitable for the use in the various regiments and colonies. We three are the committee named by Congress to make some plan for obtaining such a flag. Your brother here (turning to Ross)

tells us that you are an expert needle woman ; and that you are in the habit of making and designing flags. We thought you might be able to help us out ; or to make some suggestion, whereby such a flag may be made."

Betsy

"Yes, I have made many flags—all shapes, sizes, colors and designs. I have often wondered when at work on these flags, why so many were necessary? If we are to be one country, as we hope to be, then we should be such a *big* country that we will have room for but one flag."

Washington

"Ever since I have been in charge of the army, I have been greatly confused and troubled over the great number and variety of flags in use. For example: Massachusetts has a flag bearing the design of a pine tree ; South Carolina has a design of a rattlesnake ; New York has a white flag with a black beaver outlined upon it ; and Rhode Island, a white flag with a blue anchor, and so it goes. I believe we are to the place where something must be done."

Morris

"Do you think, Madam Ross, that you will be able to help us out of this difficulty?"

Betsy

"I am sure I don't know what I can do. I might try, although I am a very busy woman as you no doubt already know, but what plan have you to offer for the making of such a flag ; you surely have thought of something?"

Ross

(Turns to Washington) "Show her the drawing you have there in your hand, General." (Washington goes to the table and spreads the scroll out before Betsy while he speaks ; both he and Betsy bend over the table.)

Washington

"You see, it is this way : Congress voted to have the one flag, and, as there are thirteen colonies, it was suggested there should be thirteen stripes alternating red and white ; a field of blue in the

left-hand corner with thirteen white stars scattered over it. Each star is to have six points."

Betsy

"I like the idea of the thirteen stripes and the field of blue in the left-hand corner, but I don't think the stars should have six points, for that is an English design. What you should have is the French star with five points." (Betsy takes up scissors and paper and very quickly cuts out a star with five points and holds it up to view; the three men examine the pattern.)

Morris

"I believe Madam Ross has the right idea of what we want, General. The white stars with the five points arranged about on the field of blue, I am sure, will be quite good looking. When this war has become a thing of the past and if we are able to prove to the world that the people of these Thirteen Colonies have the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, there will then, no doubt, be many from across the sea who will want to find a home here in this country. There will naturally be many new states formed and the flag will grow larger by the addition of many stripes and stars."

Betsy

"Since you gentlemen have solicited my opinion, I am going to be quite free to express it. I, too, hope this country will grow to be a world power and that many new states will be added to the union. The thirteen stars which we have now should be arranged in a circle so that no one colony will take precedence over another. It will be well to add a star to the flag as each new state is admitted, but not a stripe if the flag is to remain in proportion and be a thing of beauty; I judge that is what you would want it to be."

Morris

"I feel that we are quite safe in leaving the order for this flag with Madam Ross. She seems to know our needs more than we know them ourselves." (Ross nods to Morris and looks quite pleased.)

Washington

"How soon do you think you will be able to show us how this

design will look when worked out? I am taking it for granted that you are going to do the work for us."

Betsy

"Let me see, (thinks) this is Thursday. I believe this time next week, if all goes well, I can show you a sample of the flag you have proposed. It may not be what you want—that—we will find out later." (During the call Phoebe spends her time alternating between the wheel and the window. As Betsy finishes her reply, she turns and with hands and arms akimbo suddenly develops great interest in the visitors.)

Washington

"We will be here, say, in one week from today, about this time in the afternoon. I hope you will be all in readiness for us. I know this committee will look forward with anxiety, pleasure, and anticipation to the time when we will return."

Betsy

"I'll do my best to be ready for you."

Washington

"I feel that a great responsibility has been lifted from our shoulders and that we have made no mistake in coming to you, Madam Ross."

Betsy

"I hope you will not be disappointed."

Washington

(Turns to men) "Gentlemen, I think we have consumed as much of Madam Ross's time as we have any right to. Let us say good afternoon and make our way back to the camp for the men are quite likely now looking for us."

(The three men arise, Betsy follows to the door, courtesies and shakes hands with each of them as they depart.)

CURTAIN

ACT II

Home of Rachel Sympson.

(Plain and old-fashioned furnishing. A table near center of room where Rachel sits, her head resting upon one hand.)

Rachel

"Oh dear! Oh dear! It seems it's nothing but war, war, war these days. It almost broke my heart to stand back and see my only boy go into it; maybe to be shot down like a dog. I just wonder if the time ever will come we read about when the sword will be beaten into the ploughshare, and the spear into the pruning hook; when nations will cease to rise up against nations; when we will not have any more war. But I promised Sammy I was goin' to be brave, so I must be. (Lifts head from hand, wipes face and eyes upon corner of apron, takes knitting from table, and as she knits, rocks and sings the following song to the tune of Nellie Grey, accompanied by orchestra.)

With my scrip and staff within my hand
I'll cheer my way with song
Oh so boldly I'll march along the way.
It may be rough and thorny but 'twill not be very long,
For 'twill end in Paradise of God.

CHORUS Oh in that blessed mansion
Where He's gone to make me room,
I never will have sorrow any more
I'm waiting, waiting, waiting till the Lord will call me
home.
Then with joy I will leave this weary shore.

(Repeat chorus. A knock at door.) Land sakes! Who do you 'spose is come now? (Lays down knitting and goes to door.) Why Patience Loveall I was just wonderin' who was at the door and so it's you that's come. Do walk in (shakes hands.)

Patience

"Yes, Rachel, this is what's left of me."

Rachel

"I'm real glad to see you, Patience, for I've been mighty lonesome today just a sittin' here a thinkin' of my boy Sammy, who

went into the army yesterday. But do take a chair and lay off your things."

(Patience sits down and removes her hat and wrap, gives them to Rachel who lays them to one side, and then resumes her knitting. Patience takes quilt-patch from large hand-bag and prepares to sew.)

Patience

"I'm real tired, Rachel. It's almost about all I could do to get over here."

Rachel

"I've not seen anything of you for so long, how has your health been?"

Patience

(Sighing, and in a distressed voice) "Not very well, I seem to be all out of sorts, and run down."

Rachel

"What is it that's ailin' you, Patience?"

Patience

"Oh, it's just my nerves. I wonder sometimes if I've got too many nerves or if I'm a lackin' some. I've not been any place for so long I do hope my comin' over here will not give me another set-back and cause me to send for the doctor again tonight. I'll take a dose of my medicine now if you'll give me a little water, Rachel. (Patience takes large bottle and spoon from hand-bag and Rachel gets water. Patience takes dose, showing by actions that it is a great ordeal.)

Rachel

"What sort of medicine are you a takin' Patience?"

Patience

"I don't know what it is. I told the doctor to fix up something that would be good for most everything, and he would not miss it. I've had about all there is to have exceptin' bronchitis; I've never had that yet. My lungs seem to be fairly strong, con-

siderin' everything. (Patience coughs.) So you see, it's not much wonder my nerves are all shattered to pieces."

Rachel

"I've got a remedy that might be just the thing for you. The fact in the matter, it's good either on the inside or the outside. I tried it on my foot and you'd hardly believe it, but it took off a bunion of years' standin' slick and clean. So you see it's a powerful medicine."

Patience

"Goodness knows, Rachel, I'd like to give it a trial; I'm willin' to try most anything that will help me out of my sufferin'."

Rachel

"I know it would be good for you, for there's so many yarbs in it; just all sorts and kinds and it takes a long time to get it ready."

Patience

"I'm willin' to give it a trial if it don't take too long in the makin', I'd not want to die while it's being fixed. I think some days I'm a good deal better and then the first thing I know something has happened to all upset me again.

Rachel

"I'd like to know what's been goin' on over to your place to cause your nerves to be so shattered?"

Patience

"Quite a plenty, I must say. Only yesterday the boys were all over there drillin'. John, brother Tom's oldest boy, was in the drillin' too. They would march forward, then they'd halt and then go backwards. When they went backwards, John fell into the open well which Tom keeps to water his cows and mules from. Sally Ann and me both happened to see it and rushed out a screamin' to top of our voice, 'John's in the well.' That big-headed Captain just said, please stand back, for women don't know nothin' t'all about war. They got John out, of course, but that broke up the drillin' for that time and I was glad enough. Land knows! It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good, I'm sure."

Rachel

"Well, well, Patience, that was a plenty to try most any body's nerves."

Patience

"I should reckon it was, but that's not all that's happened, by a good deal. Tom's second girl, Almeda, got a notion into her head to marry that goo-for-nothin' Bob Evans. I don't know what she wanted with him and I told her so, too. She said, 'Why, he is just a perfect wonder.' I said, 'I s'pose he is, for I guess there's wonders to be found in the shallows as same as in the deeps.' I've always looked at matrimony in such a serious way, maybe too serious, Rachel. There is one thing sure, I'm not a goin' to be in any great hurry; I've got plenty of time. Two into the harness don't always make a pair you know." (Knock at door. Rachel lays down knitting and goes to door.)

Rachel

"Of all things, if there hain't Manda Spooner that's come. Looks like my friends hain't forgot me after all." (Manda enters and shakes hands.)

Manda

"Why, Patience, are you here? How has your health been anyway?"

Patience

(Sighs, and in a distressed voice) "About like comin', no better, and I hope not any worse."

Rachel

"Lay off your things and make yourself to home, Manda." (Manda lays aside bonnet and shawl and as she takes a chair she nods to Rachel.)

Manda

"I s'pose, Patience, you didn't know that old Billy Hicks was married last night?"

Patience

(Sarcastic) "No, I didn't know anything about it. No one cares if he was. You don't need to be tellin' me about it, Manda

Spooner, I'm not goin' to be any one's second choice ; it's first love or none for me."

Manda

"I'd think most anyone would be glad to help the old man spend some of his money. You ought to send good wishes to him."

Patience

"If I send anything it would be my best wishes that his wife will be able to keep him clean, for it's more than the first woman could do. But when was he married?"

Manda

"About seven o'clock last night. A quarter till seven I saw old Billy and the new preacher pass my place. They both had on their Sunday best and was walkin' pretty fast toward where the widder Strong lives. Susan Parker was a tellin' me day before yesterday that she guessed that the widder Strong had at last landed old Billy. I think myself it's about time, for she has camped all spring on her front porch just to get to talk to him as he would pass her house. (Looks out at window) Rachel, I just then saw that old deaf Abigail Hunter pass your window. I know she's a comin' in here. I hope she'll not stay long, for no one wants to see her here. (Knock at door, Rachel goes to the door.)

Rachel

(Speaks loud) "Why, howdy, Abigail, come right in."
(Shakes hands. Abigail lays aside bonnet and shawl and at once gets her knitting from basket.)

Abigail

"I never thought I'd be findin' you a havin' company, Rachel."

Manda

"I'm real glad to see you, Abigail. How has your health been this spring?"

Abigail

(Puts hand to ear) "Hey?"

Manda

"You talk to her, Rachel. The old deaf thing can't hear thunder."

Rachel

(Goes close to Abigail) "Manda was just askin' about your health; if you are well?"

Abigail

"Why, yes, I've got nothin' to complain about; I'm as well as common. I walked a good part of the way over here. I come as far as the cross-roads with Jonathan as he was a goin' over to see that terrible poor family over by Phil Jordan's. Nothin' would do but he must carry a poke of meal and a side of bacon along over to 'em. I didn't think it was the thing to do, but there's no stoppin' Jonathan when he once gets a notion into his head. He'd give away the last thing he's got if someone would just ask him for it; I don't believe it's right to be encouragin' idleness myself.

Rachel

"Why, Abigail, that's the family we are all a wantin' to help. The father and son are both in the army. The son went first, and the father decided one day when he was at work in the field that he would go, too. He left his team a standin' and went right off, never takin' time to tell his wife he was a goin'."

Abigail

"I didn't know nothin' t'all about it."

Rachel

"Now that you do know, Abigail, don't you think you would like to do something yourself for this family?"

Abigail

"I might send 'em over a gallon of soft soap."

Rachel

"It's somethin' to eat we want to send."

Abigail

"I'd better talk it over with Jonathan before I promise anything."

Patience

"What are you goin' to take to the fair, Abigail?"

Abigail

Smooths hair) "Yes, my hair is a gettin' some gray, but Jonathan says when I'm dressed up I look like a sixteen-year old girl."

Manda

"What sort of a quilt are you now a makin', Patience?"

Patience

"It's called the 'Lover's Knot'; I got the pattern from Betsy Ross."

Manda

"Ha! Ha! Ha! I guess you're havin' a pretty hard time a gettin' the knot tied, hain't ye, Patience?"

Patience

(Sarcastic) "I'm sure it's no one's business if I am. I've not asked for any of your help, Manda Spooner."

Rachel

"When did you see Betsy Ross, Patience?"

Patience

"It's been quite a while. She gave me this pattern long in the winter. Betsy has so much work to do, she don't get away from home very often."

Manda

"I guess she's not so busy she can't be havin' a lot of company."

Rachel

"Have you seen her, Manda?"

Manda

"No, I've not seen Betsy. I saw Phoebe Allen last week, the Quaker girl who is helpin' with the work over at Betsy's place."

Rachel

"And what was Phoebe havin' to say?"

Manda

"Oh, she was a sayin' a good many things, some you'd not likely believe even if I was to tell. I guess I'd best not say anything more. The least said is always the easiest mended."

Rachel

"You don't need to feel afraid of Patience or me a tellin' anything, and Abigail will never know a word about it."

Manda

"I 'spose I had just as well tell ye for it's somethin' that's going to get out anyhow. It's too bold to be kept quiet very long. Phoebe was a tellin' me that Betsy is usin' the English tea right along on her table. You know, Rachel, as well as I do, that such work as that is being a traitor, when all the women agreed to quit usin' the tea."

Patience

"How do you know, Manda, it was the green tea she's usin'? It might be some other kind of tea."

Manda

"Why, of course, it was nothin' else but that. Phoebe says that Betsy uses her china tea pot every day, wedgewood ware, and that bein' English, is a proof enough that if she'd use one she'd use the other too. I 'spose she thinks she can go on a drinkin' her tea and it will never be found out."

Patience

"You can't make me believe, Manda, that Betsy is guilty of any such a thing. She is one of the most loyal women to be found anywhere."

Manda

(Indignant) "Maybe Miss Loveall you'll not believe it either when I tell ye that Betsy had three of the Continental Soldiers at one time last week to call on her; Phoebe heard one of them say he'd be back in just one week and he hoped she'd be all ready."

Rachel

"You are surely not a thinkin' that Betsy has another new beau. Why, she is to marry Captain Joseph Ashburn the 15th of June, they say."

Manda

"I don't know what she's a goin' to do. I know one thing, if I was in Betsy's place, I'd wait until my first man's tracks got out of the yard before I set out and was so bold a havin' any callers."

Rachel

"Betsy Ross is young and good-lookin' and we can't blame her if she has company, or if she was to get married again. John Ross has been dead now quite a bit over a year. I mind the time when he died as well as if it was today. You surely hain't forgot it, Manda? He was on Military guard down on the Delaware River and was wounded. He was brought home and lived several weeks. Betsy took such good care of him night and day as long as he lived; I'll not forget very soon how Betsy grieved when hope was given up of savin' his life, nor how she cried the mornin' John died, when she said to me, 'Rachel, John Ross has made the supreme sacrifice to help the people of these Thirteen Colonies to be free.' I was at the funeral down in the old Swedes church and you was there too, Manda, I saw you. You are getting mighty forgetful if you don't remember that."

Manda

(Looks at clock, puts away work and prepares to go) "I see it's gettin' late and I'd better be goin'; I've got some work to do yet before dark. I want to go see Betsy Ross tomorrow. She will be expectin' her callers at that time. I'm a goin' to find out the truth, just what the company she's a havin' means, then, if some busy-body gets it into their head to start a tale of gossip. I can stop it pretty quick. If there is a thing I can't stand, Rachel, it's this gossipin' and tellin' tales on your friends."

Patience

(Lays aside work and prepares to go) "I'll be a goin' too. I want to rest my nerves a little more so that I'll be strong enough to get over to see Betsy tomorrow myself."

Abigail

(Looks up surprised) "Why are you folks a goin' now? I'll have to wait on Jonathan; he said he would come for me."

Rachel

(Goes to door) "I hope you will both come back real soon. Now don't wait so long about it next time. If I can get through with my work in time, I'll try and get over to see Betsy."

Manda

"Patience and me will expect to see you there. It's your duty to go, Rachel."

CURTAIN

ACT III

(Betsy busy with work at the table; Phoebe preparing the tea-table at the opposite side of room, and as she works she sings a very sentimental love song. During the time her Quaker lover enters room, unobserved by Betsy. Phoebe continues to sing accompanied by orchestra and at the same time shows by her actions that the young man must keep silent. She gives him some article of food which he hurriedly gulps down. At the end of the second verse Betsy turns toward Phoebe giving the young man barely time to make his exit.)

Betsy

"I do wish you could do your work and not sing so much. You're going to drive me mad if you don't stop it pretty soon."

Phoebe

"I'm so happy it seems to me I'll want to sing the rest of my life. Like once when I had a tooth pulled I was that tickled I was plum skeart. When the heart is so full of joy, the gladness just bubbles over and thee can't help it."

Betsy

"There seems then to be more in your heart than your head. I don't see how you can even think of a song, much less sing one, when there is so much sorrow and sadness all about us."

Phoebe

"Well, I'm happy just the same (dances about room). I believe I'd want to sing even if I was to see a bullet come thru that window there." (Points to window.)

Betsy

"That would depend on what the bullet hit. You might have to sing your swan song, Phoebe."

Phoebe

"Ha, Ha, Ha! I'd like to know what's that; I'll bet thee never heard a swan sing, Madam Betsy."

Betsy

"O Phoebe, Phoebe, what are you coming to! I wish you would go to your work."

Phoebe

(Rushes over to Betsy with dish in one hand and tea-towel in other.) "I'd be so pleased if I could sing this one song for it is so nice."

Betsy

"Well, go on and sing and then stop; I would like a chance to think." (Phoebe takes her place near the center of room and sings. At same time she works vigorously with dish and towel. Every now and then the young Quaker thrusts his head in at the door. At the close of her song, Phoebe makes her exit. Knock at door.)

"Go and see who is at the door, Phoebe!" (Knock again.) Betsy turns around to find the girl has disappeared. She lays her work on table, arises, and looks about the room.

"I wonder where she has gone to now; I have come to the place where I can't depend upon her for one thing!" (Opens door.)

"Why, Patience Loveall, so it's you that has come. Come in! (Shakes hands.) I am glad to see you, but sit down and lay aside your things."

Patience

(Patience fairly drops into a chair out of breath. She removes things and hands them to Betsy who lays them to one side and then resumes her work at the table.) "I'm tired enough, goodness knows, Betsy, to take a chair and never to get up. I walked so fast a comin' over here and then bein' all run down to begin with; it was just a little more than I'm equal to standin'.

Betsy

"Why, what is your trouble, Patience? I had no idea that you had poor health."

Patience

"It's just my nerves, now, Betsy, pure nerves; a sort of lettin'

up of the many things I've fell heir to in the way of afflictions. It's terrible to be so nervous; why, my hands and feet are that numb it's a perfect miracle that I'm a livin' and breathin' today. I just thought if I'd come to see you that maybe you'd cheer me up a spell. I'll declare, I wanted to get here in time for my next dose of medicine. (Looks at clock.) I see it's run over four minutes and it will be five before I can get it down to save my life. I do hope it will not make any difference. If you'll hurry and give me some water, I'll try and take it." (Betsy gets water and Patience takes a large bottle and spoon from basket and takes medicine.)

Betsy

"It might do you good, Patience, to lie down there on the lounge for a while."

Patience

(Patience goes to lounge with a great deal of effort.) "I expect it would, for I'm mighty shaky."

Betsy

(Knock at door. Betsy goes to door.)

"Well, well, it seems it never rains but what it pours! Manda Spooner and Rachel Sympson! What is going to happen? I thought you had both forgotten me. I guess you have planned a surprise party for me. But do walk in and lay off your things." (The two women enter and lay aside their wraps and take chairs.)

Manda

(Turns to Patience as she lays aside things) "Why, howdy Patience. You here too? It does look like we are givin' Betsy a surprise for sure."

Patience

"Yes, I'm here, Manda, but that's about all I can say. I'm so weak."

Manda

(Gives Rachel a nod.) "It might be, Betsy, that if you could make her a cup of good strong English tea it would strengthen her and be good to quiet her nerves."

Betsy

(Earnestly.) "What are you talking about, Manda Spooner? When the women of the Thirteen Colonies agreed to not use any more of the English tea, that included me, for I'm not a Tory. Could you make that kind of tea for her, Manda, if she was at your house?"

Manda

"Well, no, Betsy, I couldn't; for I put all mine in the fire. I just thought you might have saved a drawing or two to use in case of sickness."

Betsy

"I have none of the grene tea to use either in sickness or in health. I could not give Patience a cup of it even if it was to save her life. But I will be glad to make her some spice-wood or sage tea if she wants it."

Patience

"Never mind, Betsy; don't put yourself to any trouble for I'm feelin' some stronger." (The two women knit and Betsy resumes her place at table.)

Betsy

"It seems I have so much to do I will have to go on with my work while we visit." (Knock at door, Betsy lays aside work and opens door. The two women nod very knowingly at each other. Betsy courtesies as George Washington, Robert Morris, and Geo. Ross enter. Patience hastily leaves the lounge and takes chair, arranging her hair with great care.)

Washington

"I hope, Madam Ross, we are not going to spoil an afternoon party for you by our coming."

Betsy

"Oh, no, General Washington, not at all; it is just some of my old neighbors who have come in for a little visit. Mrs. Spooner, Mrs. Sympson and Patience Loveall (points to each of the women). Ladies, this is General George Washington and Robert

Morris and George Ross, my brother-in-law." (The men bow very politely and Manda and Rachel recognize the introduction by a nod, and Patience arises and makes a very elaborate curtsy. Betsy gives the men chairs.)

Washington

"I trust, Madam Ross, that you were expecting us and that you are ready for us?"

(Manda looks at Rachel and nods.)

Betsy

"I think so, General, and I hope your committee will be pleased with what I have done." (Betsy goes to the back of the room, pulls a cord and a beautiful flag is slowly unfolded before them. As the orchestra plays "Three Cheers for the Red, White and Blue" all stand amazed, Manda and Rachel continue to knit—rapidly.)

Washington

"I must say that I am surprised and astonished beyond measure. I never thought it would be one-half as beautiful."

George Ross

(Goes close to Washington and puts hand on shoulder.) "I told you, General, that my sister Betsy was an artist and I guess now you see that what I told you is true." (Washington and Ross each examine the flag.)

Patience

(Goes close to Morris.) "Would you like a drink of water?"

Morris

"I thank you, Madam, I am not at all thirsty."

Patience

"I'm not Madam, I'm Miss Patience Loveall."

Morris

"I beg your pardon, Miss Loveall." (The sound of fife is heard on the street playing "Yankee Doodle.")

Patience

"Do you like music?"

Morris

"Why, yes, I like good music."

Patience

"Oh, so do I. I like it quite lively too; sometimes I think there is somethin' inspirin' about the song 'Yankee Doodle' even if it is an English tune."

Morris

"Indeed!"

Patience

"I 'spose I'm just a little giddy once in a while, but you know you can't put an old head on young shoulders. There are quite a few things I can do, even if my folks do call me a silly young miss."

Morris

"I judge then you are quite an accomplished young lady?"

Patience

(Tries to appear confused and embarrassed.) "Oh, I don't know about that. I do line to keep house and I like to cook. I can cook and keep house real good. I sing too, but not so very well. I just sing loud."

Washington

(Turns to Morris.) "Come, Morris, and examine the work on this flag. It's a perfect marvel to me. (Turns to Betsy.) I don't see, Madam Ross, how we are ever going to be able to pay you for such artistic work."

Betsy

I did not know I was expected to receive pay for doing what I call my duty. Have you not yet come to the place, General, where you are able to realize there are some things in this life

too sacred to be polluted by even the mere mention of compensation?"

Washington

"You have received pay for the flags you have made in the past. Why not for this one? It seems to me it is a matter of business, since the needle is the weapon with which you keep the wolf from the door."

Betsy

"Yes, I have made many flags and I have taken pay for my labor, but this is the first time I have made a flag to represent a nation, a whole country. So it is my flag as well as your flag. It means a great deal or it means nothing. This history of this flag will be the history of the Thirteen Colonies. If it lives and floats and the breeze, it will mean life to us, if not, the chances are a rope will dangle over the heads of a good many people and you, General, will perhaps be one of the number."

Washington

"What care I if they hang me, provided the rope by which I am hanged binds these Thirteen Colonies into one free and independent nation? But I never once thought you would consider the making of this flag such a serious thing. Have you lost your courage, Madam Ross? Are you afraid?"

Betsy

"No, I have not lost my courage; far from it; neither am I afraid. With the blood of my ancestors tingling in my veins I could not very well be a coward, but it is best to not be too sanguine in the matter. This is a time which tries men's souls and women's too. The struggle in which we are engaged, includes all of us. When old Liberty Bell chimed forth her message less than one year ago my ears were not so deaf nor my heart so dumb as to not understand its meaning. Before I turned my hand to the work on this flag, I tried to get it clear in my mind just what this flag was to mean—just what I was expected to do. Then it was I turned to this old Book, the Book in whose teaching you rely, and upon which our ancestors pinned their faith. I wanted to see what message I might find here. This is what I read. (Opens Book and reads.) Proclaim liberty to all the inhabitants and to all the

nations thereof. Just what Liberty Bell declared when it was rung. So then I understood this flag I was to design was to mean liberty. Every color, liberty; every form of star and beam or stripe of light, must mean liberty. When I did take up the work I felt I must try and stitch into the warp and woof of this flag some of the principles of democracy. I believe that God is watching this little band of people; that He is going to make of this land a cradle of liberty and will rock it to and fro with omnipotent arms and as the nations hear the thunder of the rocking, I pray it may never cease till liberty will need rocking no more."

Washington

"I see, I see now quite plainly it is a serious thing. Strange I have been so stupid. I have been so busy with war matters, I will confess, I had not stopped to really analyze what our committee had asked you to do. Now that I do understand, let me ask you to pardon my seeming indifference. Now that I must stand sponsor for the Continental Congress, may I add a blessing too? (Takes each of Betsy's hands in his.) May your cup be full and overflowing with the good things of this life. What you have this day done I believe will be told in long years from now for this flag will live. While the spirit of prophesy is upon me, I feel it is safe to say that generation after generation will listen with eagerness to hear the story of the birth of the flag. Your name will be blazoned upon the tablet of the heart and become a household word, for you were the one who made

First of the flags of earth to dare
A heraldry so high
First of the flags of earth to bear
The blazons of the sky; (takes up corner of flag)
Long may thy constellations glow
Foretelling happy fate—
Wider each starry circle grow
And every star a state.

Let us hope that this splendid banner will give us high ideals of National character, ideals that will exclude the jingo, the bully and the public charlatan, ideals that will dedicate our conscience to a deep love of Country. I have said enough, Madam Ross, and more than enough, to manifest the spirit in which this flag is received. As we lift it to the gale and see the sign of hope upon the

storm clouds which roll and rattle about it, I am sure it will speak for itself more eloquently than I can speak for it."

(Phoebe dressed in colors of the flag and wearing a cap covered with stars suddenly appears on the scene holding the hand of her lover. A semi-circle is formed about Betsy, while all join in singing "The Star Spangled Banner.")

CURTAIN

JAN 13 1989

